

# Stage News and Comment on the Plays

## 3 Plays of Small Town Life Tend to Monotony in Theatre

Is It Lack of Inventiveness in Dramatists or Public Demand That Brings So Many Plays of Similar Kind to the Stage?

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

AN evening which adds five new plays to the prevailing supply is, of course, likely to bring forth almost anything. In spite of the methods of the frenzied theatre, however, it is impossible to overlook the significance of the presence of three plays of small town life in the latest crop. Then another drama of the demireps came along in the latest contributions of the playwrights to the contemporary theatre.

The whole of the first act of "Thank You," which contained in some other scenes novel and interesting points of view on the part of the playwright, was made up of the same sort of fun that brought the enduring success of Denman Thompson. The parvanity of the country vestry, the little jealousies of the village women, the lack of any knowledge of life outside the narrow circle of their interests—all these are the familiar stuff of the hick play that seems now to be the one form of dramatic expression of the American genius which is destined to be with us always.

On the same evening another standardized play of country life came to the local stage in "Just Like a King," by John Hunter Booth. "Main Street" followed on Wednesday. Then there is already "Wait Till We're Married" at the Playhouse.

It would be interesting to know if the public demanded so many of these plays that authors are in reality justified in expending so much time on them. Or is there a painful lack of inventiveness in the native playwright? Does he never think of any other field? Or does he consider it better to play safe by sticking close to the kind of dramatic fare on which Americans are known to thrive?

Of course "Main Street" is different in spirit and is to be considered along with these plays merely because it happens to treat of existence in a small community. Does the so-called rural play represent in reality the dramatic material of which this country most approves?

It must be kept in mind that the preference for fun of the rural type is not exhibited in the theatre only. In the music halls, the Chautauqua entertainments and allied efforts at diversion there is always the same prejudice in favor of the man or woman who will perform, perhaps not with the same perfection, but with an approximate skill, the Chic Sales kind of a programme. To imitate the nasal tones, the uncouth manner and the awkwardness of the entertainer in the basement of the Methodist Episcopal Emanuel Church or reproduce the efforts of the village musician is to find almost perfect success. This prejudice in favor of the hick humor is too firmly established to be a matter of accident. The American audience loves it.

### Recalls Famous Successes.

Then one need only recall the long life of "The Old Homestead" and "Way Down East." They have outlived nearly all their contemporaries. More to the point is the persistent vitality of their own expedients. They are tried, as we know, in every rural play that happens along, and we know that they are classed as "sure fire" by the playwrights and the actors. Why the audiences in American cities should take such special interest in this type of play is not easy to understand.

It is no longer true that so many of the city dwellers are but one generation from the American small town. A much larger percentage of the theatregoers in American cities are now but one generation, or two at the most, from the steamer that brought them and their forebears here.

It is not easy then to understand why the exaggerated representations of rural life should appeal so strongly to them. But it is a fact statistics will readily prove that the American theatre public dearly loves the rural play and rejoices most of all in its fun.

One reason why the frequent appearance of this kind of play might be attributed to the indolence of the dramatists is the docility with which in other cases they follow the line of least resistance. William Hurlbut wrote "Lilies of the Field," which was acted at the Klaw Theatre the other night. The play is a study of the life in the unclassified circles of society which have interested playwrights ever since Avery Hopwood found such enduring prosperity with "The Gold Diggers." Mr. Hurlbut has added some amusing characters to the list of his predecessors.

Perhaps none of these is more laughable than the grande dame as it were of the gutter who recalls with such sentimental emotions the generosity of the fathers of the young men of the day. The play seems to have been through some such drastic processes of condensation or change that it is certainly not at present what its author set out to make it. The abrupt ending for instance is in all probability the result of so much alteration that the playwright lost all perspective. But it is not "Lilies of the Field" that is so much a subject of interest as its kind.

### Fannie Hurst's "Back Pay."

Fannie Hurst wrote "Back Pay," which is to the writer a much more interesting essay in the same field since it has more sincerity and filled one act of the four with the chatter of the gold diggers, which does not in this particular play last into the other acts. There are one or two other dramas impending in which the same material is used. It cannot be that the public is just as much interested in this passing manifestation of the demirep as it may be in the characteristic tales of rural life.

It is, then, that the authors are too lacking in enterprise to break new roads? Do they follow the line of least resistance in warming over the familiar material? Are they lacking in ambition or imagination that they are satisfied to offer the alternation of country play and bedroom farce, of chorus girl chatter and small town ascents to fortune?

It is always enough to reply that giving the public what it wants is a business that the managers understand better than their critics. Sometimes we wonder. Certainly the appearance of the theatres on these autumn nights would not indicate that

taste of the public corresponded altogether to the play the managers offered them.

### Concerning Peter Grimm.

The current performance of "The Return of Peter Grimm" at the Belasco Theatre represents the art of the theatre in such fine estate that the representation stands in a peculiar relation to the rest of the plays to be seen just now. One could almost, as it were, draw a line of division between them, such a line indeed as put Mr. Belasco's production in a place of its own and left the rest of the plays somewhere else.

It may not be that their performance is necessarily inferior or any less illustrative of the newest and best in stage art. Wherever "The Return of Peter Grimm" might be it would certainly be altogether different from anything else in the contemporary theatre.

It is not alone in the appanages of Mr. Warfield in the second and third acts that the extreme skill of Mr. Belasco in mechanics is shown.

There could be nothing truer nor lovelier than the atmosphere of the gardener's home in the first act. The picture is built up with the meticulous beauty of a Dutch interior of the seventeenth century. Every stroke is carefully paid in its place, but in the perfect sense of home and loveliness of life that results there are no traces of the craftsman.

The result is most exquisitely revealed, but the workmanship which created its qualities is nowhere visible. This is in reality the art that conceals art; in other words the perfect art of which Mr. Belasco is the supreme master in our theatre.

## Did You Hear . . . . . ?

That Mr. Ziegfeld Believes in Lower Theatre Prices, That Miss Barrymore Has a New Play and That Miss Lawrence Will Play Tragedy?

By LUCIEN CLEVES.

LORENZ ZIEGFELD, Jr., had just come back from Boston to report that the road tour of the "Follies" opened there with the largest receipts the company had ever drawn when he stopped talking about that incident long enough to discuss the important question of theatre prices. The "Follies" are less expensive on the road than they were here and the forthcoming "Frollo" will be accessible at a lower rate than ever before.

The reduction of theatre prices had to come, Mr. Ziegfeld said to the reporter of The New York Herald, "in spite of the raise of the schedule of the 'Follies' this summer to \$5. I could not put a \$250,000 in a small theatre like the Globe and not lose money. When it came to sending this National Institution on the road, I felt it a duty to show my loyalty to the public by reducing the prices, since I have had such generous support during the fifteen years I have sent the 'Follies' through the country."

"The result of this will be a season without a cent of profit to me. So great is the cost of transportation and costumes, so advanced are the salaries of actors and musicians, that I shall have no possible margin of profit. But I had contracted to send the 'Follies' to certain cities and I am already assured a sold out house for every night in every city they visit. The increase in the cost of the 'Follies' has during the years been enormous. The official books show that the first year the cost was about \$25,000, while this season it took \$224,798 to prepare the show. Such an investment is, of course, hazardous in hard times."

"I knew the reduction of prices had to come. I know that the public is not fickle and will patronize the 'Follies' rather than any of the numerous reviews which imitate mine without approaching it. I believe that the tax should be five instead of ten per cent. I also know that too many actors are receiving salaries out of all proportion to their abilities."

### Miss Barrymore's New Role.

When Ethel Barrymore needs a successor to Zoe Akenside's immensely successful "Declamations," which is repeating on the road again this season, all its first triumphs, she will act in a new play by

Alice Dues Miller. It is founded on "Manslaughter," which has just appeared serially. In this play Miss Barrymore will act the part of a wilful and headstrong daughter of a parvenu, who is without noble in nature and good in heart. She kills while speeding her car on a Long Island road a traffic cop whom she had previously tried to bribe. Of course the District Attorney who brings about her conviction is the same one she had previously loved and flouted. But two years of imprisonment on the charge of manslaughter bring a change in her character. She is even worthy to marry the all but disheartened District Attorney when she is free after her prison term.

Tragedy for Miss Lawrence. The medieval Spanish tragedy which Sam Harris has accepted from William Archer will not after all be produced until after Christmas. Mr. Archer is anxious to be here for the first performance and Mr. Harris is just as anxious to have him here. Hence the postponement. Probably Mr. Harris feels more over that just at the minute he has succeeded enough on his hands.

In the meantime Miss Margaret Lawrence, who will make her first appearance as a tragedienne in this drama of the Velasquez period in Spain, will be seen in another of Mr. Harris's enterprises. It was a surprise to Mr. Archer to have Miss Lawrence selected for the role in his serious play as he had known her only as a comedienne.

"But you have the face of a comedienne," the playwright protested gallantly. "Think of an actress playing tragedy with a pretty, reticent nose like yours! Is such a thing possible, a tragedienne with a reticent, piquant nose, blond hair and blue eyes?"

"Some of the very wickedest women I know," Miss Lawrence answered according to the fable, "have turned up noses, blue eyes and blond curls and look as if better would not meet in their mouths."

At this overwhelming proof of his mistake, Mr. Archer withdrew all objections to this new style of tragedienne.

Savage Rises to Point of Order. "What's all the shootin' for?" may I beg in the words of George M. Cohan, asks Henry W. Savage. "In the cast of 'The Merry Widow' there are six American singers, which makes the proportion about 50 per cent. So the native artist is well represented. I would gladly have them all Americans, but that does seem a somewhat difficult matter to arrange."

"One of the troubles with the average young American singer is that he or she—it can be as readily be one as the other—wants a large salary before the singer has learned the least thing about stage technique. I am willing to pay



ARNOLD DALY in "The VAN DYCK" Greenwich Village Theatre.



ALLAN POLLOCK in "A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT" George M. Cohan Theatre.

any price necessary to get the best available talent. But not only for my own sake but for my public, I must expect a certain amount of skill. "It must inevitably follow that the foreign singer has a surer technique when they have a period of training so much longer than our Americans. It is impossible to have training when there are salaries to be paid the same that finished artists receive. But I am delighted to engage American artists and pay them whatever salary they may be worth so long as I am getting a trained artist. As a matter of fact, I love nothing better than the pleasant task of engaging my own country people and pay them large salaries."

Irving Berlin's Fixed Charges. Wouldn't it jar the old time theatre manager to read this report from Sam H. Harris of how much it costs to run The Music Box Review? Mr. Harris slipped these figures to the reporter for THE NEW YORK HERALD: "The production cost \$200,000. The Pearl number alone represents an outlay of \$25,000. The cost of operating the production and theatre averages \$22,000 weekly. Of this amount \$15,000 goes for salaries to the company. The weekly bill for musicians is \$2,000. "Backstage there are seventy-five

stagehands whose weekly salaries aggregate \$2,200. The balance of \$2,200 is spent and paid for advertising, printing, tickets, lighting, in salaries for the house manager and his assistants, the treasurer, usher, rest room attendants, cleaners, porters, etc."

### Players and Dramatist.

When little Margalo Gillmore made such a great success in "The Famous Mrs. Fair" there were dire predictions that some manager would make her a star and thereby ruin her chance of any artistic progress. The worst has happened. George C. Tyler has engaged Miss Gillmore to be the star of Eugene O'Neill's forthcoming "The Straw." But in order to put all the wisecracks to confusion Miss Gillmore has exacted from Mr. Taylor that she shall in no way and at no time be referred to as the star of the play. One head still seems to be on straight.

Harry Davenport, who gives such a beautifully human and lifelike performance of the clergyman in "Thank You," is just now celebrating his fiftieth anniversary on the stage. His acting ought

## Singer Heads the Vaudeville Bill At the Palace

Miss Adele Rowland in a recital of song and story, Carl Randall and company in dances, the Four Mortons, Paul Whiteman and his Palms Royal band and John Steel, in a song offering, will be another of the multiple-powered bills promised for the Palace the coming week. W. G. Fields' eccentric farce, "The Flivertons and Their Family Ford," will be another act. Others will be Burns and Prede, Elmer El Cleave and two surprise features.

The chief acts at other vaudeville houses follow:

RIVERSIDE—Harry Fox and company, Franklyn Ardell and company.

EIGHTY-FIRST STREET—George Jessel and company, Mabel Julienne Scott in the photoplay "No Woman Knows."

COLONIAL—Hassan Short's "Klick Klick," the Avon Comedy Four.

HAMILTON—Karyl Norman, Arman Kalls and company.

ROYAL—Henry Santrey and his band, Harry and Anna Seymour.

ALHAMBRA—Harry Carroll and company, Margaret Young.

FORDHAM—"Twentieth Century Review," Lazar and Dale.

LOEW'S STATE—Fay Marbo, Gareth Hughes in the photoplay "Garments of Truth."

PROCTORS FIFTH AVENUE—Harry Delf, "Parlor, Bedroom and Bath."

PROCTORS TWENTY-THIRD STREET—Becky and Claude, Neapolitan Duo.

PROCTORS FIFTY-EIGHTH STREET—Mrs. Gene Hughes and company, Burke and Durkin.

PROCTORS ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIFTH STREET—Pan-American Four, Walter Fisher and company.

## Surprise Programme For the Winter Garden

Bert Clark and Flavia Arcaro are among the names announced as co-knowledged "leasers" for a surprise bill to be presented at the Winter Garden. Others are George Price, Nonette and Regal and Moore. The remainder of the programme will be disclosed at the opening performance.

At the Shuberts Forty-fourth street theatre Cecil Lean and Cleo Mayfield, El Brendal and Flo Bert will be the featured players.

## "Nice People" to Be Played in Brooklyn

Miss Francine Larrimore will be seen in "Nice People," a comedy by Rachel Crothers, at the Montauk Theatre beginning to-morrow night, under the direction of Sam H. Harris, with the original New York cast and production brought from a season's run at the Klaw Theatre, New York. Among those in the supporting cast are Rod La Rocque, Louise Prussing, Merle Maddern and Gordon Alexander.

Glida Varrel will appear at Teller's Shubert next week in Brock Pemberton's production of "Enter Madame," the high comedy of operatic life, by herself and Darryl Byrne, in which she attained popular success at the Fulton Theatre last season. Henry Stephenson has the male lead.

"Irene," the musical comedy record breaker, remains at the Majestic Theatre. Eddie Leonard, Emma Carus and Ruth Budd will be the headliners at the Orpheum. Others will be "The Love Haze," Miller and Capman and El Rey Sisters and company.

The usual B. F. Keith Sunday concert of headliners will be given this evening at the Academy of Music. Pola Negri in "One Arabian Night" will be the photoplay feature at the Strand.

"Gypsy-Burly" will be the burlesque offering at the Star.

## "Merry Widow" Soon Starts on Long Tour

"The Merry Widow" to-morrow begins the last two weeks of its New York engagement, and despite its success at the Knickerbocker, Henry W. Savage intends to leave to his advance promoter and send the Lehar opera on a forty weeks' tour of twenty-five American cities, while his "International singing cast" of opera stars is still intact. Both Miss Lydia Lipkowska and Miss Dorothy Francis, who have the two principal feminine roles, have been "loaned" to Mr. Savage for this season only by the Chicago Opera Association. Reginald Pasch, the Dutch tenor who plays the Prince's role, will probably be seen next season in leading Wagnerian roles. Frank Webster, English tenor, will return to Covent Garden, London, and Georges Dufranne to the Opera Comique, Paris.

## Calendar of the New Plays

### MONDAY.

GEORGE M. COHAN THEATRE—Charles Dillingham will present Allan Pollock, supported by Miss Janet Beecher, in "A Bill of Divorcement," London dramatic success, by Clemence Dana. This will be the star's first stage appearance since August, 1914. Basil Dean staged the production. The balance of the cast includes Miss Katharine Cornell and Charles Waldron.

GALE THEATRE—"The Wren," a new comedy by Booth Tarkington, with Miss Helen Hayes in the leading role, will be presented under the management of George C. Tyler and A. L. Erlanger. It tells of a certain little group of people in a summer boarding house in Maine. George Fawcett returns to the "speaking stage" to create an important part. Leslie Howard will have the part of a susceptible artist-lover. Others will be John Flood, Sam Reed, Marion Abbott and Pauline Armitage.

GARRICK THEATRE—"The Theatre Guild will open its season, presenting "Ambush," by Arthur Richman. Its scenes are laid in the home of a clerk in Jersey City. Because of its unusual construction Frank Reicher, in the leading part, is on the stage continuously. Miss Florence Eldridge plays the part of the daughter, and others in the cast are Jane Wheatley, Katherine Proctor and John Craig. The production has been staged by Robert Milton.

GREENWICH VILLAGE THEATRE—Arnold Daly's company begins its season with a double bill, comprised of "The Children's Tragedy" and "The Van Dyck." The first play, written by Carl Schoenherr and translated by Benjamin F. Glaser, will have as its players Miss Nedda Harrigan, Philip Tead and Sidney D. Carls. The second play is a duet surprise comedy from the French of Andre Savoir and Pierre Ducroc. Mr. Daly will play the part he originated here, and William Morris, comedian, will play Holbrook Blinn's part. It is adapted from the French by Cosmo Gordon Lennox. Both plays staged by Mr. Daly, with settings by Livingston Platt.

TIMES SQUARE THEATRE—Oliver Morosco will present the new melody drama, "Love Drama," by Ann Nichols. The score is the work of Werner Janssen, while Mr. Morosco supplied the lyrics. The story is of the love adventures of a prima donna. The cast includes Miss Vera Michelena, Orrin Johnson, Tom Powers and Miss Maude Eburne.



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